

Mahncke Park Neighborhood's Early 20th Century Urbanization

Broadway Avenue at Brackenridge park, circa 1930. Source: San Antonio Light Collection. The Institute of Texan Cultures, University of Texas at San Antonio.



Preserving the intrinsic beauty of the San Antonio River, both Brackenridge Park and Mahncke Park were magnets for residential and commercial development. The establishment of a streetcar line that extended along River Avenue (now Broadway) to Alamo Heights and completion of Olmos Dam in 1926 prompted the modern development of the Mahncke Park area as a suburban neighborhood.

The Alamo Heights street car line began operations in the 1880s. In 1890, a brief description of the line was provided by William Corner in *San Antonio de Bexar – a Guide and History*:

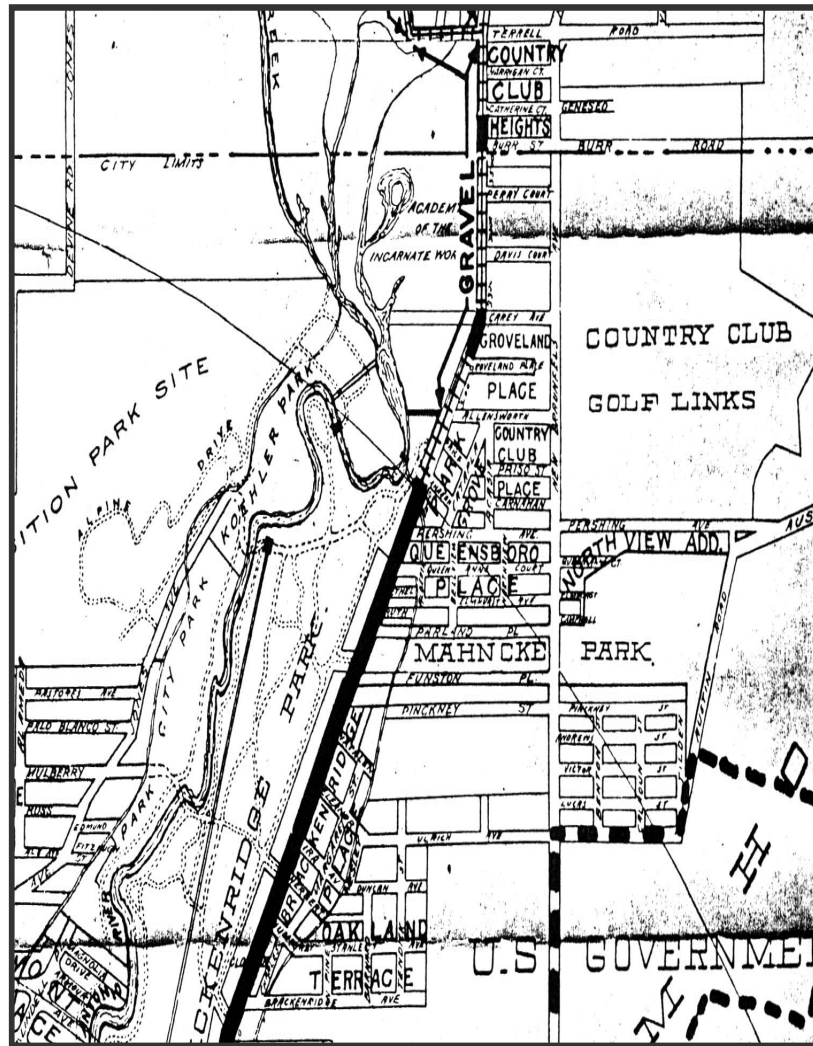
“This line, starting from the Alamo Plaza out Avenue E into Austin street, past the Southern Pacific R. R. Depot into River Avenue past the head of the river, encompassing that property to the Alamo Heights, (is) a new and important addition to the improved suburbs of the city. Color, yellow; night light, purple; fare, nickel.”¹

Around the turn of the century the land around Allensworth and Carnahan had belonged to the Rev. Wallace Carnahan, who was a longtime headmaster at Saint Mary's Hall. One of the earliest residences was the Floyd McGown - J. Lewis Pipkin House, built in 1886 at 511 Brackenridge Avenue.² The earliest platted subdivisions included Oakland Terrace (1890), Park Grove (1907), Bracken Ridge Place (1909), Groveland Place (1912), Queensboro Place (1912), and Country Club Place (1923).³

¹William Cornne, editor. *San Antonio de Bexar: A Guide and History*. Bainbridge and Corner, 1890, p. 7. (facsimile reproduction) San Antonio Conservation Society library.

²Jacobs, *op.cit.*

³The Map of the City of San Antonio. 1924.



Right: 1924 City Map Showing the Earliest Platted Subdivisions. San Antonio Public Library, Texas Department.

Bottom: Playing Golf at the San Antonio Country Club. Source: Bruce Martin Collection.



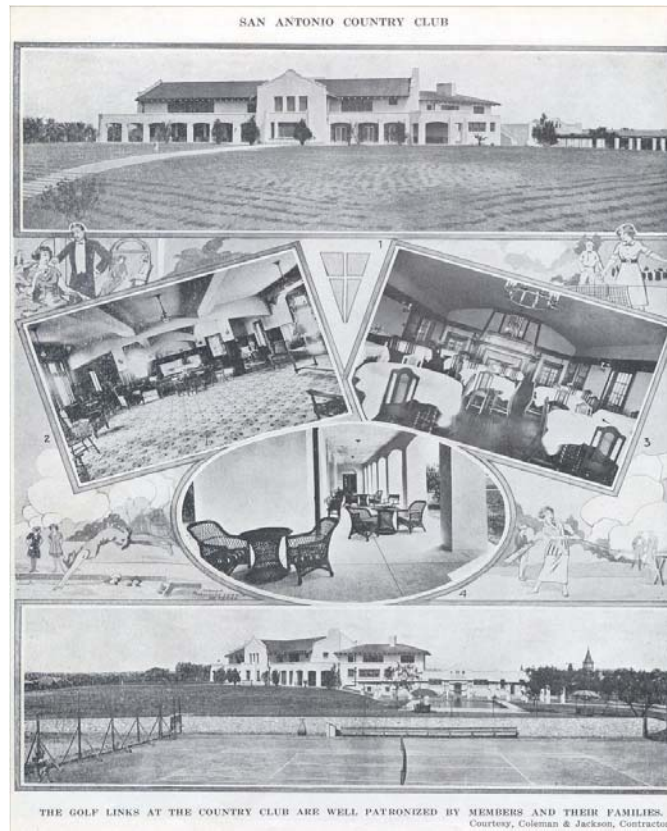
The establishment of the San Antonio Golf and Country Club on N. New Braunfels contributed to the area's development. Organized in 1904, the San Antonio Golf and Country Club sought a site for a golf club, after three years of playing golf in a cow pasture. George W. Brackenridge granted the group a 20 year lease for 1235 ½ acres of land with an option to buy at the top of a hill just a short walk from the River Avenue streetcar. The club was chartered in 1907, and a clubhouse designed by Atlee B. Ayres in English half-timbered style was opened in 1908. In 1916, the clubhouse burned and a Spanish style clubhouse was completed in 1917. The building was later remodeled in 1958, in 1972-1973, and again in 1993. Today the San Antonio Country Club has approximately 1,800 members.⁴

⁴ *The San Antonio Country Club – A Brief History*. Typed manuscript. San Antonio Conservation Society library.



Above: Post card of San Antonio Country Club, circa 1908. Source: San Antonio Public Library, Texana Department.

Right: San Antonio Country Club. Source: *Greater San Antonio – the City of Destiny and of Your Destination*. San Antonio: Higher Publicity League of Texas, 4th edition, 1923. San Antonio Public Library, Texana Department.



By 1912, the streets and blocks from Brackenridge north to Ulrich Avenues between Fort Sam Houston and River Avenue (Broadway), and from Ulrich (Eleanor Avenue) north to Pinkney St. between the Fort and New Braunfels Avenue were laid out. The northern most named street was Cow Avenue, now known as Hildebrand.⁵

Two water works pump stations were located in Brackenridge Park – No. 1 near Allensworth and No. 2 near Army Boulevard. Although streets were evident, little building construction had taken place, with exception of two institutions – The Salvation Army Rescue Home near the intersection Cow and River Avenue and Dr. Moody's Sanitarium at Stanley and Pine Streets.⁶ The 1917 City Directory shows that development was sparse. By this time only two residences were located on N. New Braunfels north of the San Antonio Country Club. There were three residences on Eleanor, and three on Reservoir (now Pershing Avenue). Twenty-four residences were located on River Avenue (now Broadway). The Salvation Army Rescue Home, the North Loop Saloon, and the Academy of Incarnate Word were in the 3000 block of River Avenue.⁷

⁵ *The Map of the City of San Antonio*. Compiled and drawn from the records by Hy Rullman, engineer and draftsman. Published by Nic Tengg, 1912. San Antonio Library, Texana Department.

⁶ Fire Insurance Map of San Antonio. New York: Sanborn Insurance Co., 1912.

⁷ *Jules A. Appler's General Directory and Householder Directory of Greater San Antonio*, 1917.



1925 Advertisement for H.C. Thorman's Model Homes.
San Antonio Express News.
 Source: San Antonio Public Library, Texana Department.

H.C. Thorman, a prominent San Antonio developer, contributed to the development of the Mahncke Park neighborhood with the construction of modern bungalow homes in the Country Club Estates in the mid to late 1920s.⁸ Thorman was born in Toledo, Ohio, on November 26, 1884 to Mr. and Mrs. C. F. and Dora Thorman, German immigrants who had settled in Ohio. He married Lula Lumley, a native of Ohio, in Toledo on November 28, 1905. In 1907 he began his career as a San Antonio homebuilder, and built hundreds of homes in the City. He developed the San Antonio Country Club Addition, and the Olmos Park Estates, known as "the most beautiful of the exclusive residential sections of San Antonio." He practiced his trade as a contractor in Toledo, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Oakland, and Portland, Oregon, before locating to San Antonio. He served as President of the San Antonio Real Estate board in 1925, and was considered "one of the most progressive and enterprising businessmen of the city."⁹

The term "bungalow" was used widely in the early 20th century in describing an affordable, comfortable, suburban American house. The actual Bungalow style of architecture developed from a blend of Oriental, Arts and Crafts and Prairie School architectural influences. This style was characterized by low pitched roofs and wide eaves; exposed rafter ends and knee-brace even brackets; usually asymmetrical faces with broad porches supported by massive, battered piers, sometimes of rustic materials; and expansive free-flowing living and dining rooms accessed by the front door.¹⁰



Examples of the type of bungalows constructed by H.C. Thorman in other San Antonio residential developments.

Source: Greater San Antonio – the City of Destiny and of Your Destination. San Antonio: Higher Publicity League of Texas, 4th edition, 1923. San Antonio Public Library, Texana Department.

⁸ Bonnie Sue Jacobs, *op.cit.*

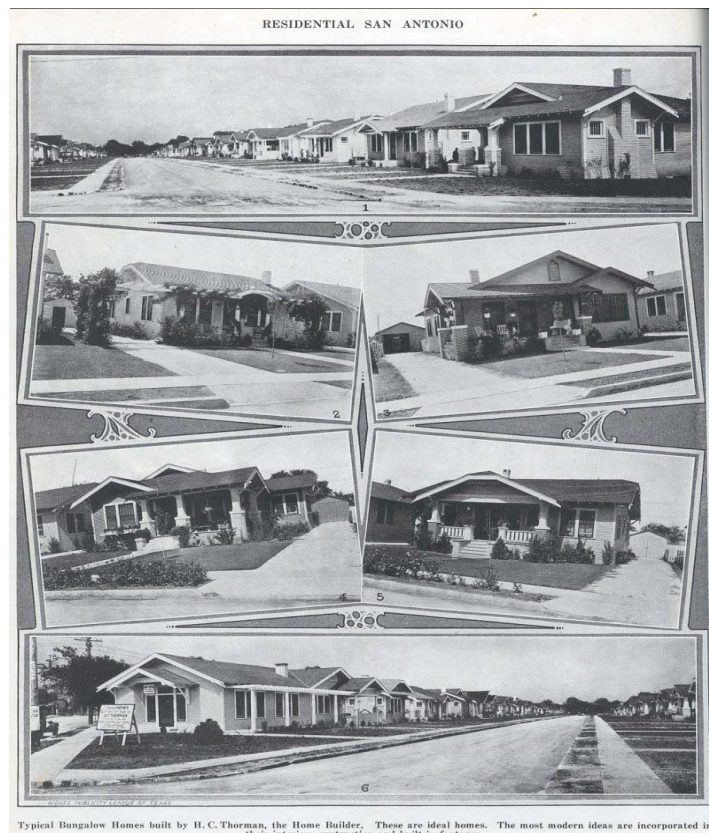
⁹ Ellis A. Davis and Edwin H. Grobe. *New Encyclopedia of Texas*. Dallas: Texas Development Bureau, 1930, p. 421.. San Antonio Conservation Society archives.

¹⁰ *Guidelines for Listing Your Property in the national Register of Historic Places*. Austin: national Register Department, Texas Historical Commission, 1995, p. 27.

Thorman's bungalows featured "beautiful large rooms, hardwood floors throughout, tile bath with shower, large cedar closets, spacious includes service porch, concrete front porch, double garage, ribbon drive, shade tress and shrubs." The homes were sold "completely furnished, including Frigidaire, for \$1000 cash and balance monthly like rent till paid."¹¹ One advertisement by H.C. Thorman touted, "New bungalows you can afford - \$250 cash. The prices are \$3,750 and \$5,240. They have hardwood floors in living and dining rooms, built-ins and breakfast nooks in the kitchens. Electric lights, gas, water, and sewers."¹² Around this time, urban development was occurring to the north of the Mahncke Park Neighborhood. In 1919, a group of six families and three bachelors settled on a 24 acre tract that was formerly Terrell Farms, a water main and gas lines were laid from N. New Braunfels Avenue to the area and a deed was recorded in 1920. On March 31, 1939, the town of Terrell Hills was incorporated. The southern boundary of Burr Road was finalized in April of 1945, and the town saw steady growth through the 1950 and 1960s.¹³

Examples of the type of bungalows constructed by H.C. Thorman in other San Antonio residential developments.

Source: Greater San Antonio – the City of Destiny and of Your Destination. San Antonio: Higher Publicity League of Texas, 4th edition, 1923. San Antonio Public Library, Texana Department.



¹¹ H.C. Thorman Realtor advertisement "Completely Furnished - \$1,000 Cash," *San Antonio Express*, August 16, 1925, p. 6A.

¹² H.C. Thorman Realtor advertisement, "New Bungalows You Can Afford," *San Antonio Express*, August 23, 1925, p. 6A.

¹³ Col. Cal Johnson, "The City of Terrell Hills," Terrell Hills Police Department web page. www.geocities.com/Heartland/Park/4013/thecity.htm.

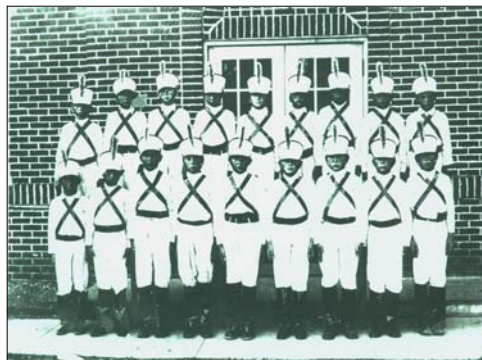
Another nearby community, Alamo Heights, was developed on the Charles Anderson ranch and a former federal government arsenal site. Although established in 1893, the Alamo Heights Land and Improvement Company actually began a program of expansion in 1909 that included a school building. The residents of Alamo Heights voted for an independent municipality and an independent school system in 1922.¹⁴

As San Antonio's population boomed in the 1920s, a program to build modern schools was launched to accommodate the new urban growth. The River Avenue Improvement League addressed the School Board regarding the need for a new school. Three and a half acres were purchased at 201 Parland Place for the construction of a new school. Lamar Elementary was constructed in 1924, replacing the former school that opened in 1878. The school building contained eight classrooms, a small cafeteria, and a principal's office upstairs. During the 1920s and 1930s, Mahncke Park served as the site for special school events hosted by the Mother's Club. Mrs. Norman T. Kirk, along with other interested mothers, organized a Mother's Club in 1926, which later became the Lamar Parent-Teacher Association. PTA projects included supplying food to needy families, providing a playground, making improvements to the school grounds, and initiating tuberculosis testing. In 1930, two classrooms were added to the west end at a cost of \$18,081.27. Shortly thereafter, in 1936, a cafeteria and auditorium were added at a cost of \$12,769.80.¹⁵

During World War II, Lamar's enrollment was primarily children of families at Fort Sam Houston. In 1966, the building was remodeled to provide a clinic, a principal's office, a secretary's office and a book depository. The elementary school closed in 1975 because of declining enrollment. During the next decade, the building served as a special campus for handicapped students. At the urging of the area residents and the Mahncke Park Neighborhood Association, the School Board voted to reopen Lamar as a mainstream elementary school, and it opened in the fall of 1985 with an initial enrollment of 285 students.¹⁶

"Each year we had a Mayfair and each class represented a different country.... The fund-raiser at Mahncke Park sported a Maypole, games, booths, a pie and cake sale, and a class king and queen."

Account of Lamar School Fair, circa 1930, *North San Antonio*



Lamar School class photographs, circa 1933. Source: Lamar Elementary School.

¹⁴ Minnie B. Cameron, "Alamo Heights, Texas," *The Handbook of Texas Online*. Austin: Texas State Historical Association, last updated Feb. 15, 1999. www.tsha.utexas.edu.

¹⁵ Rene Lynn, "Lamar Principal Greets new Job with a Smile," *The North San Antonio Times*, September 10, 1984, p. 12. Rene Lynn, "Pair recalls Lamar School," *The North San Antonio Times*, July 19, 1984, p. 1. Vertical files, San Antonio Public Library, Texana Department. "History of Lamar School, 1936-1937" & "Our School's History (1924-2000)," typed manuscripts, Lamar Elementary School vertical files.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

In addition to single family homes, multifamily dwellings were prevalent in the neighborhood. Apartment houses were constructed along Broadway and in the southern part of the neighborhood. The Brackenridge Apartments at 3308 Broadway, were situated at the corner of Funston Place opposite from Brackenridge Park. A 1925 newspaper advertisement noted that "the builders of the Brackenridge Apartments have set a precedent in Apartment House construction in San Antonio." The apartments had six large five-room apartments, each equipped with Frigidaire, with no charge for maintenance." Planned and built by C. R. Lowrie, the apartments were priced at \$100 per month unfurnished and \$150 a month furnished. Four kitchenettes were also available at \$75 a month. The complex featured elevator service, maid service, and a garage for every apartment.¹⁷



Broadway began to develop as a commercial strip, during the 1930s and 1940s. One of San Antonio's legendary eateries, Earl Abel's, located at Broadway and Hildebrand in 1940. Earl Abel was one of America's greatest theater organists during the Vaudeville era. When 'talkies' put organists out of business, Abel entered the restaurant business in 1936 when he opened The Garden of Eatin' on 1910 N. Main Avenue. He later moved the restaurant to Romana Plaza, and then to its present location at 4200 Broadway.¹⁸ On Broadway, the restaurant first opened as a drive-in and later as an indoor restaurant that operated 24 hours a day. The first all- booth restaurant in the South, Earl Abel's is still operated as a family establishment. The restaurant passed to Earl Abel Jr., who managed his family's landmark restaurant for 19 years until his death in 1999. The restaurant is presently owned by Jerry Abel, brother of Earl Abel Jr.¹⁹

San Antonio Eateries on Broadway, mid 20th century. Source: Bruce Martin Collection.



¹⁷ "Beautiful Brackenridge Apartments," *San Antonio Express*, August 16, 1925, p. 2A.

¹⁸ Paul Thompson, "Earl Abel's Common Sense Was Sobering," *The Sunday Express-News*, April 2, 1989, p. 3-A.

¹⁹ Cindy Tumiel, "Earl Abel Jr., ex-manager of family eatery, dies at 72," *San Antonio Express-News*, Monday, March 22, 1999. San Antonio Conservation Society vertical files.



Tourist Courts in Mahncke Park Neighborhood. Source: Bruce Martin Collection.

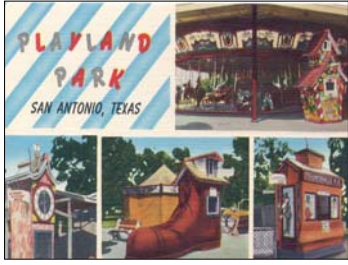


Several courts were situated on Broadway including the Parkview Motel (2900 Broadway), the Ranch Motel (3101 Broadway), the Aero Motel (3535 Broadway), Motel De Lux Tourist Court and the Park Motel Tourist Lodges (3617 Broadway). The Broadway Tourist Cabins, Carmen Court, and The Oak Lodges were located on Brackenridge Avenue between N. Pine and Broadway.



Children's recreational facilities included the Lion's Club Athletic Field and Play Ground, located at the southwest corner of Broadway and Mulberry, and Kiddie Park, a children's amusement park at the northwest corner.²⁰ When Mr. P.W. Curry opened Kiddie Park in 1925, it was the nation's first amusement park established to cater exclusively to children. In its early days, goat, burro, and pony rides were available, but the land where those rides were was sold to make way for a gas station at the northwest corner of Broadway and Mulberry. Many of the original rides are still in operation,

²⁰ *Fire Insurance Map of San Antonio*. New York: Sanborn Insurance Co., 1924 (corrected 1943-1951). San Antonio Public Library, sheets 191-192.



An area attraction, Playland Park, established in the late 1940s near Alamo and Broadway, and was famous for its wooden roller coaster. Source: San Antonio Public Library Post Card Collection, Texana Department.

including the "Little Dipper" roller coaster, a carousel, a helicopter and flying saucer ride, hand-operated cars, a miniature school bus ride, a Ferris wheel, and a boat ride.²¹ In 1978, Bob Aston bought Kiddie Park and he purchased a number of items from Playland Park when it closed in 1980. The steel Eifel Tower, clown tops for the trash cans, and the bunny and pony two seat carousel were all originally at Playland Park.²² In 2001, Kiddie Park continues as a San Antonio institution while providing affordable entertainment at a beautifully shaded property between Brackenridge Park and Broadway.

A few blocks from Kiddie Park was another site San Antonio children enjoyed for years. Parland Place was the location for San Antonio's All-American Soap Box Derby Races, which were held in 1940 and 1941 and from 1947-1960. The races started at the top of Parland Place near North New Braunfels Avenue and finished 1,000 feet away near Lamar School. Parland Place was retopped prior to the races to ensure a smooth surface, and stripes were painted to define three lanes for the racers, which reached speeds of 24 miles per hour. In 1941, Mayor Quinn declared July 13 as Derby Day in San Antonio and designated Parland Place as Derby Downs.²³

Excerpt reprinted from "Historical Sketch of Mahncke Park," Mahncke Park Neighborhood Plan, September 2001.

²¹ Leslie Hicks, "Kiddie-ing Around for 70 Fun Years," *San Antonio Express-News*, June 15, 1995, p. 1E.

²² Susan Diehl, "Generations Enjoy Park," *North San Antonio Times*, December 10, 1981, p. 1.

²³ Information contributed by Bruce Martin, Mahncke Park Neighborhood Association.